

Bourdieu questions

There seems to be an ongoing tension in Bourdieu's work and career between the need to describe what keeps society static, in place, habitual and thus resistant to change, and his own perceived need to have social change, especially in his more activist work. How can we understand this? What does his analysis gain by seriously accounting for the perpetuation of social structures and how, using that analysis, can we have any hope for change or any strategy?

A number of different commentators have discussed Bourdieu in relation to women and feminism. In English, Terry Lovell, a British sociologist (who has written some on media) is extremely skeptical or hostile to B. Part of this may be due to her own position within British feminist thought. She has been highly critical of the strong trend of female intellectuals who look to French theory and especially psychoanalysis and who demote the study of society (see esp. her footnote 1).

Lovell, Terry. "Thinking Feminism with and against Bourdieu." Reading Bourdieu on Society and Culture. Ed. Bridget Fowler. Oxford: Blackwell, 2000. 27-48.

An earlier pair of articles from about 1990 by literary theorist Toril Moi gives a very full and rich analysis of how B could be used by feminists and culture critics. (see also the introduction to this section of her anthology)

Moi, Toril. "Appropriating Bourdieu: Feminist Theory and Pierre Bourdieu's Theory of Culture." What Is a Woman? Ed. Toril Moi. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999. 264-99.

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Feminist culture theorist Judith Butler offers her view on B. In one of those embarrassing slips, she tries to read B's concept of habitus as a response to Althusser's idea of ideology by missing the actual historical sequence that B's concept predated A's work on ideology.

Butler, Judith. "Performativity's Social Magic." Bourdieu: A Critical Reader. Ed. Richard Schusterman. Oxford: Blackwell, 1999. 113-28.

Given that B collected much of his data from sociological surveys in which people were asked to respond, the data on "taste" is largely self-reported. Yet statisticians and demographers also report that self-reporting is often skewed to a "higher" expectation. That is the interviewee often wants to present themselves as "better" than their actual

behavior is. Does this present a problem? How would we account for “actual” cultural consumption rather than “presumed” cultural consumption?

Often the discussion in Distinction seems to place people in very narrow boxes or categories. Consider Andy Warhol’s observation that in the USA there is a democracy of consumption: he used the example of Coca-Cola which is consumed by all social classes and strata (contrasted with Europe, which second generation immigrant Warhol viewed as being highly stratified and in which the highest levels did not have the same beverages as the lower levels.) Is this the case?

Consider salty snacks in the US (many other cultures do not have salty snacks). The basic and cheapest one is home-made popcorn. However, the biggest selling one is Lay’s potato chips and its variants (with ridges, different flavors, baked, etc.). Fritos and Doritos continue the type which is easily identified in the supermarket by its own geographic section. Is there a “distinction” among salty snack consumers? Is it related to cultural capital? Does Whole Foods offer a different type or range of salty snacks?

Would there then be distinction in salty snacks and beers at different Super Bowl parties?